Bill Wallisch

In the Belly of the Whale

Like Joseph Campbell, I'm hooked on the tales of those who are called to duty, bravely face danger, and win. Campbell devoted a lifetime linking the path of the classic heroic journey to the legends and folklore of the many cultures he studied. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he said, "The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale." To be sure, our heroes are our role models and mentors.

Even though Campbell deals with war, he didn't have a lot to say about the campaigns of the last hundred years or so. World War I, for example, attracted his attention only briefly before he returned his focus to the battles of Greek mythology, the Old Testament, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and the Koran.

For me the stories of modern battles and heroes began with my father's firsthand tales of slugging his way through five fronts in World War I. From my uncles, cousins, and neighborhood guys in Pittsburgh, I got stories about their adventures in Europe and the Pacific in World War II. And when I got my Air Force commission, I walked into a place of living legends where everywhere there was a story just waiting to be heard—all around me, in living color.

These tales also followed the key steps of the archetypal heroic journey: The Departure, where the hero is called to adventure and ultimately finds himself in the belly of the whale; The Initiation, where one endures the road of trials to achieve the goal of the quest; and, finally, The Return to the freedom to live, transported home on the wings of magic flight. Along the way guides, helpers, and personal atone-

ment save the day—just in the nick of time.

Sometimes the stories were spontaneous, maybe at midnight chow or on a long flight somewhere over the Pacific. Show a little interest and you were treated to something special. Often they were a part of a training curriculum or a speech at a service school. No matter for me, I can listen any time, anywhere.

At my first squadron, Colonel Joe Routzong told us brown bars about earning his forty-mission crush on gut-wrenching bombing missions over Berlin. Likewise, Major Tom Brown would relive flying through flak and swarms of Fokkers while we rolled the dice for beers at happy hour. Senior Master Sergeant Serdono recounted the missions he flew with LeMay. I'd seen it at the old Temple Theatre, with Jimmy Stewart, Van Johnson, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracey, and the Duke. But now we were talking with the real thing. Stories, stories, stories.

As the years went by, the personalities and the legends got even bigger. I actually got to sit with General Curtis LeMay as he told me about tracking Arthur Godfrey down where he was hunting in the Texas hill country. Like the guides and protective figures in mythology, Godfrey agreed over a fifth of Jack Daniels to plug LeMay's quest on the radio waves to give the general the magical help he needed to move Congress for better pay for the troops and support for SAC. From Jimmy Doolittle I got a vivid personal glimpse of what it was like to be in the belly of the whale during those legendary 30 seconds over Tokyo. With hands describing the path of his F-4 Phantom, Vietnam Ace Steve Ritchie told me how he was almost shot down himself had it not been for a quick-witted radar officer who pointed him to his fourth and fifth kills by warning, "Steve, they're two miles north of you!" Such it is for the hero to travel the road of trials, fight in the whale's belly, be rescued by guides, and reach victory on magic wings.

My father told me what it was like to look up from the trenches to see Americans and Germans dueling each other high above No Man's Land on graceful wings. Imagine how exciting it was to sit in the Air Force Academy Superintendent's office late one afternoon and listen to a group of American Overseas Fliers recount their skirmishes. They were my father's war, his generation, and may have even flown above the Keystone Division he loved and spoke of all his life.

Some of these old fighter pilots leaned on canes. But with eyes as bright as they were in 1917, they told of being called to duty and crossing the first threshold of the quest as student pilots in France.

They spoke of their initiation into air combat. These were green aviators, fresh from the smoky cities of the East or from the farms of places like Nebraska and Kansas, thrown up against experienced German pilots with many kills painted on their cloth-covered airframes. And like the heroes of Campbell's favorite legends, one old pilot told us of his own atonement. How it happened in a desperate moment that his American prairie roots inspired him to rely on his farm-boy instincts—to climb high, turn, put the sun at his back, dive at his pursuer, and get his first kill. "I used sun and hunch," he said. "That was the secret."

The great thing about this story telling deal is that admission is free and there's not a bad seat in the house. I finished up my twenty-one year military career by teaching at the Air Force Academy. What a place for stories. If you spent any time there, for example, you were sure to spot a notice in the Fairchild Hall academic building elevators that Robin Olds or Chuck Yeager or somebody like that would be holding forth in one of the lectinars after classes. If anything, the danger for some was "ho-hum, not another ace." Not for me!

Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* brought the stories home for many who hadn't heard them or may not have been listening. Thanks to his book, those who haven't served in uniform got a taste of what us "lifers" experienced almost every day. It also helped to encourage many who had been silent to finally pass on their wondrous adventures and tales of sacrifice to family and friends. You just never know when somebody's going to open up and share a good yarn.

As a matter of fact, it happened to me rather unexpectedly last fall, the day after a wedding in Minneapolis. We were invited to breakfast by the bride's parents and that's how I came to be sitting in a sunny Wayzata kitchen with the two grandfathers: Jim and Gil.

Now when you first see these two guys, you know they have a story to tell. And once the coffee was poured, it didn't take long. Gil says, "You can call me Red. That's what they called me in the Pathfinders." And Jim quickly adds, "I was the only case of frostbite in the Pacific!"

The Pathfinder Force that Flight Officer Gilbert "Red" Darcy flew with in World War II was an elite corps of RCAF crews that marked targets by night in Lancasters that went in solo, without fighter escort. These Pathfinder guys were legendary. To look at Gil, you knew why. His hair wasn't as red or thick as it was when he enlisted in '42, but he and his wife Louann looked as sharp as ever in their matching fire engine red shirts with white blazers.

Flight Officer Gilbert "Red" Darcy, First Row, 4th from Left

Sgt Jim Krantz, First Row, First Left, Kneeling

While Red was flying through "bumblebees and searchlights" in the European Theatre, Army Air Force Sergeant Jim Krantz was on the other side of the world fighting off Japanese Zeros as a gunner from the left side blister of a B-29 Superfortress. "I was in Twentieth Air Force, Twenty-First Bomber Command, Seventy-Third Bomb Wing, Four-Ninety-Seventh Bomb Group, Eight-Sixty-Ninth Squadron," he says. Some details you just never forget.

"I grew up with holes in my pants and then they made me a gentleman," says Red. "I grew up with a rifle in my hands in Tennessee and that's what made me a good gunner," Jim says.

Words like grit, determination, savvy, and hunch came to mind as they talked. "It was shoot and survive," was how Jim described it. "I never questioned a thing," says Red.

Red's 405 Squadron was located at Gransden Lodge on Old North Road, County Bedfordshire, ten miles from Cambridge. The squadron motto was *DUCIMUS*, "We Lead." And his commander was the legendary John E. "Johnny" Fauquier, known as "The King of the Pathfinders." Red still savors the moment when Fauquier, the "old man" finished a squadron mission briefing in his usual brusque way by pointing to Red and saying: "That man there! His hair's on fire!"

When he wasn't piloting his Lancaster into the belly of the whale, Red liked to ride that Old North Road to where the girls were on his trusty Harley. "I couldn't use the light—blackouts, you see—so some of those rides in the pitch black were interesting! You should have seen the time I was bringing back fresh eggs and had a crack up!"

Jim's Eight-Sixty-Ninth Squadron was based on Saipan, part of the legendary Twentieth Air Force. Like Red, he was good at his job. On mission after mission, Jim's B-29 would be part of a 12-plane diamond formation of Superfortresses, slugging their way through heavy fighter resistance to hit Japanese homeland targets like Musashi and Akashi. "We had it made if we just stayed stacked in, our 50 calibers punching away at them." That was Jim's job, sticking out there in that left blister, his deadly Tennessee trigger finger at work.

"We sacrificed armament for bombs, went in alone, and joined up over the target," said Red as Louann beams with pride.

Armament or not, that old B-29 was one big target, especially if it got separated from its formation. Like Red's solo Pathfinder, the Superfortress formations had no fighter escort to protect them. Jim talked about the special dangers gunners faced, how so many had been hit and severely

wounded. "You could be blown right out of your bubble," he said. In fact, on December 24, 1944, a Zero scored a hit on the top blister of Jim's plane and one of his gunner buddies was nearly pulled right out of the airplane had it not been for his seat belt and the quick hands of crewmates.

That happened on Jim's sixth mission and it got him to thinking. "If that hada been me, I'da been gone," he said. "I had a seat belt all right, but if I buckled in I couldn't see forward enough. I needed a good 180 degrees to see better, to get a good shot, and that belt held me back. So, when things got hot, I unbuckled and wasn't ever really fastened in."

So he drew on his Tennessee hunch and decided "to rig up a harness for myself, just in case." On Christmas day of 1944 Jim and a buddy went looking around the squadron for buckles, parachute rings, webbing, and straps that might do the job. He later told *Yank Magazine* the contraption he put together "Was a rig made out of an old chute harness. One part of it went around my waist and then there were two straps that went over my shoulders, crossed in the back, and fastened to the belt again." His buddies were for the most part unimpressed.

Red Darcy had some pretty big odds stacked up against him as well: "We lost 96 Lancasters over Nuremberg alone!" In all, the RCAF Pathfinders flew 50,490 individual sorties against 3,440 targets and lost 3,727 men in the process. Both Red and Jim knew what it was like to face the road of trials in the belly of the whale.

On August 9, 1944, Flight Officer Red Darcy was at the controls of his "lumbering Lancaster, softening up Normandy." Among his crew of eight were Bill Kubiak, rear gunner; Mickey Quail, the "old guy" at 28; Reggie Swartz, bomb aimer; and the flight engineer, a smallish Englishman they called "Gnomie."

Red and his boys usually flew at 20,000 feet, altering course ten to twelve times to avoid the crosshairs of attacking Junkers and the flak the German anti-aircraft guns were throwing at them. But on this day, they were on the deck at 2,000 feet. No matter, with 50 missions already under his belt, Red knew his stuff. "I wasn't fighting a war," he says. " I was doing a highly specific job, doing what I had to do, never letting my crew down."

On January 3, 1945 Jim Krantz boarded a B-29 with a wholesome-looking gal mascot ("American Maid") painted on her fuselage, tail marking A Square Seven, along with his newly created harness. He hoped it would protect him, yet give him the range of movement he needed to

aim and shoot. The target that day was the docks at Nagoya, Japan. Before takeoff, Jim securely attached his new harness to the beam structure of his airplane. The lanky gunner from Tennessee was ready to go on his seventh mission.

With that the listeners gathered around that kitchen table were no longer in Wayzata. We were strapped in the belly of the whale with Red and Jim. The young people who came and went through the kitchen gave us smiles, but didn't stay. They didn't seem to notice the contrails and flak, hear the roar of laboring engines, or smell the smoke swirling around in the kitchen. Grandson Jay did say, "Someday I'm going to the Air Force Academy," as he left the room, his skies of adventure still ahead.

"Boom! Hit on the bomb bay! We're on fire," Red says as he leans forward over the dishes on the table. "Then we're hit on the aileron." Responding to our wha-ja-do-then look, Red says, "I told everybody to bail out"

When the left side blister of A Square Seven was blasted to smithereens somewhere over the Nagoya docks, Sergeant Jim Krantz was blown headfirst from the lukewarm, pressurized atmosphere of his Superfortress to 3.3 psi and freezing temperatures. "I went out fast and my gun sight went with me!" But his homemade harness held! So well, in fact, that it extended full length, dragging Jim alongside the airplane like a rag doll on a string. Now the airplane had two mascots outside: American Maid and Sergeant Jim Krantz.

The one thing that didn't go with Jim was his oxygen mask. "I was knocked unconscious almost immediately and without oxygen they said I should've been dead within 15 seconds." But Jim didn't die and his death-defying odyssey lasted over fifteen minutes. Back inside, his crewmates had their full attention on the bombing run. "Once they got off target they were able to get hold of my .45 pistol holster, pull me in, and give me a shot of morphine." They couldn't believe he was alive.

Once Red Darcy gave the order to bail out, his crew wasted no time following the skipper's advice. The engineers, Red, and the bomb aimer went out the front hatch at 1700 feet. The navigator and wireless operator went out the mid door. Remember Bill Kubiak, the rear gunner? He rotated his hatch and fell out into the waiting night sky, only to be captured on the ground. Everyone else evaded capture. Back at 405 Squadron, returning Lancaster crews reported seeing eight parachutes leave the ship.

"When I hit the ground I took a two-by-four inch piece of my parachute for a souvenir, buried the rest, and started to walk," Red says, as if he were telling you about yesterday's golf outing with his son Randy. "I knew I had to hide from the Germans, so I hid out in a six-foot crevice in some large rocks. My routine was to walk by night and hide in the big rocks by day." Not a scratch on him.

Flying with Jim's group that day in another Superfortress was a flight surgeon. He watched Jim's ordeal from a window and even took a picture. He radioed Saipan that there would be a corpse on board when A Square Seven landed. It took six hours to make it back to home plate.

Jim remained on Saipan until January 9, 1945 when the Army flew him to Hawaii. Once there he became an instant celebrity at the North Section Hospital at Schofield Barracks. Jim was the first frostbite case—ever—in the Pacific.

"Hardly any of the doctors had ever seen frostbite, so they kept coming in my room to see me, all bandaged up to my elbows." says Jim, looking down at his hands. "My ring finger just rotted off and the doctor in charge told me that if I didn't soon get some circulation going, they'd have to amputate." Amputate! Jim Krantz was twenty-two years old.

Red Darcy walked and hid and walked and hid, until "One day I spotted two men with rifles on a hill. All I had was my Smith and Wesson. But then I saw they had British uniforms on and I knew I was on my way home." The two men who beckoned to him were members of the 51st Highland Division from Aberdeen Scotland. Red was safe.

I could only imagine what a celebrity guest he must have been for the Highlanders. They had a little party for him before he left on magic wings. "They contacted the French underground and I got a ride back to England in a small single engine plane." At ten in the morning a little airplane touched down and Red's instructions were to run alongside, hop on board, and hang on for a quick takeoff. Nothing to it.

Jim's trip to Hawaii wasn't the end of his ordeal. But just as things were at a low point, a young doctor from Brooklyn showed up at the hospital looking for one of his friends. "He was just out of medical school, on his way from Philadelphia to report somewhere for duty out in the Pacific," says Krantz with a smile. "And by luck he comes in to see me and my frostbite."

Jim remembers his nurse was Ruth Hayse, "from Mississippi or Louisiana, I think." The young doctor said that even though he didn't know

much about frostbite "this just looks like a bad burn case." Treat it like a burn!

The doctor also remembered a new procedure he'd read about. So they rushed to the library in hopes of finding the journal that described the process. "They decided he might as well give it a try."

With Nurse Ruth Hayse reading from the journal, the medics went to work. "They didn't use any anesthesia, so I could tell them if I got a sensation when they injected 20cc's of this fluid into my shoulders with a needle that looked to be about eight inches long." They told him it would feel like somebody hit his funny bone.

"I did. I felt it. And in about four hours both my hands were nice and warm," says Jim reaching for his wife Mildred's hand. She was his new bride in 1945, waiting for him back in Clarksville, Tennessee. "It was on the radio and someone came to the house to tell her," says Jim. They wrote about it in the *Clarksville Chronicle* and in newspapers most everywhere else. Jim told his story to fellow GIs in *Yank Magazine*. By that time, a lot of gunners were wearing the Krantz harness!

Jim and Mildred have been married for 59 years. They hug each other like it was yesterday.

When Red Darcy got back to England they didn't quite know what to do with him. You just didn't send guys like that back up for more. Not even a Pathfinder. Red didn't really want to call it quits, especially because "I was having so much fun riding that old Harley around."

But, they sent him to HQ in London where they gave him two weeks leave. The best part, says Gil, was when Howard H. Morrison, Wing Commander, stamped the last entry in his logbook: Aircraft shot, on fire, wing off, parachuted to safety. "He stamped it. I saluted. And I walked away a full half inch taller. And I can look anybody in the eye and not flinch."

When he returned to 405 Squadron, they gave him more leave. It turns out that his brother Leycester was a bomb loader in the squadron. Ley had always wanted to go on a mission with his big brother, but Red told him, "We don't want our mother to lose two sons." After his reunion with his brother and squadron mates, Red headed for Scotland, where he ended up catching the Queen Mary for home. Like the classic heroes, Red endured the road of trials and returned from the belly of the whale with the freedom to live as he pleased. To look at him you know he's never flinched.

If you go to the village Great Gransden today you won't find Gil's old squadron, but you can pay a visit to St. Bartholomew's Church. There

visitors can see a beautiful window dedicated by the people of the parish to honor the memory of the 801 airmen of 405 Squadron killed in action. I forgot to ask Gil what became of the Harley. But Mrs. Darcy did get to keep both of her boys.

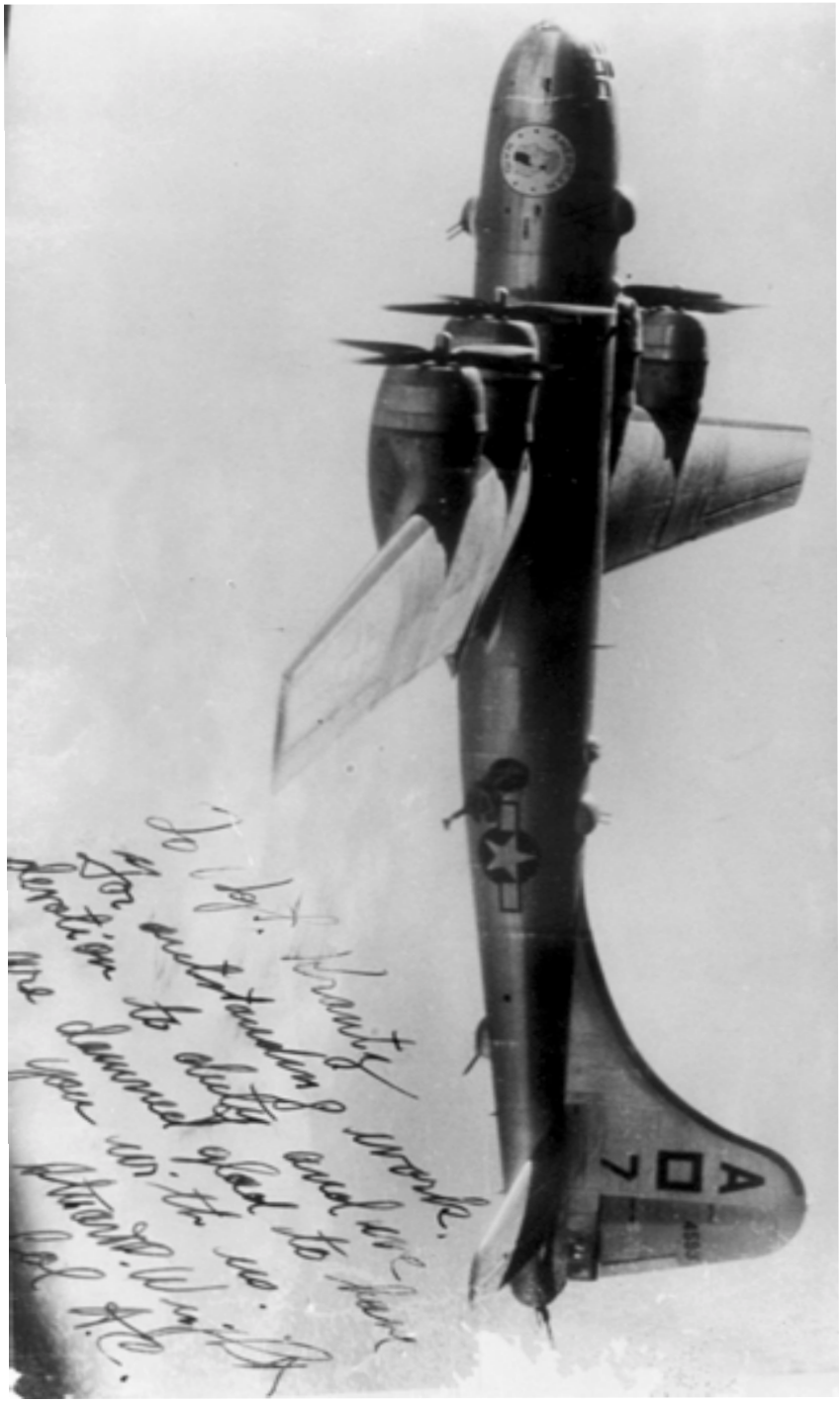
Jim Krantz stands proudly in daughter Cathy's living room and takes from the mantle a framed reproduction of the American Maid logo. And when Jim hands you that photo the flight surgeon took you can see that same American Maid logo painted just to the rear of and below the cockpit. Further back, midway between the wings and the tail, there's Jim being dragged through the freezing cold air. Written in a bold hand, below the airplane, on the right hand corner of the picture are these words***: "To Sgt. Krantz: For outstanding work, devotion to duty and we are damned glad to have you with us. Stewart P. Wright, Col, A.C."***

After the stories were told, the flak and smoke cleared from the kitchen. The sound of the engines faded. Outside, the birds were singing in Wayzata. The young people of the wedding were laughing and loading cars in the driveway. Taking the bet that I wouldn't know the lyrics, Red and I got up and sang some familiar lines together: "To the tables down at Morries, to the place where Louie dwells," and "Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, the long and the short and the tall." And as I stood there, singing along with the old Pathfinder I felt just like Jim's colonel did: Damned glad that Red and Jim were with us. And honored to have heard their stories.

So even though I've hung my own uniform up, the stories go on. There are tales of all kinds, told by the heroes and scallywags who lived them. Some are tall tales that got a little bigger with the years. In fact, there's a saying by the people of Zimbabwe: "Until the lion learns how to talk, the tale will glorify only the hunter." Time and memory do that.

I once sat on the grassy shore of a small lake in Columbia, South Carolina that the writer James Dickey lived on, listening to his stories about flying night fighters in the Pacific. Several of the canoes used in the filming of *Deliverance* were right there, dragged up on shore. My buddy Jim Gaston was there, too, and we both listened intently as Dickey told us good stories about Donald Armstrong, making rings out of coins during downtime in the squadron, and even how actor Burt Reynolds didn't know "a damn thing about handling a bow."

Gaston could relate to Dickey's flying insights more than I because he was a pilot. My Air Force operational specialty was radar intercept officer; I was struck by how Dickey so clearly understood the feel of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working on the scope when he said, "I always thought a radar man might get a real sense of God-like omnipresence as he watches the radar sweep out the details of the world in glowing green and gold hues." That's exactly how he said it because I wrote it down as soon as I could.

Much later we found out that in fact Dickey was a "radar man," just like me. No wonder he understood the magic of what we called "The Crystal Ball." Truth was, he wasn't a pilot at all. Henry Hart's biography of Dickey talks about the tall tales Jim Dickey told, but I liked the old rascal's style anyway. Pilot or not, he did do his scope work from the back seat of that night fighter. He did serve his country. He did lay his life on the line on every mission he flew. Dickey and I exchanged letters after that visit to Columbia. The ones he wrote me are locked up in my safety deposit box at Air Academy National Bank. He was a good storyteller. They're right next to the letters from my correspondence with cosmic storyteller Gene Roddenberry.

Now there are new generations of young storytellers. My own son, Bill, amazes me with the recounting of his saga in Desert Storm. A tank commander in Second Marines, 2nd Tank Battalion, his colonel called me on the phone to tell me how valiantly Captain Bill conducted himself in battle. His scorecard: 25 fearsome Soviet T-72 tanks destroyed in face-offs with his inferior M60A1at knife-fighting distance. His WWI doughboy grandfather would have been proud.

Joseph Campbell did write about the astronauts and the wonders of their modern-day odysseys. Because I do some training for NASA, I've gotten to sit and listen to these space travelers spin tales of blast offs, zero gravity, and adventures in orbit.

I've been right there in the astronaut training room in Building 4S at the Johnson Space Center as a "flown" astronaut like Steve MacLean tells a new class of astronaut candidates what it's like to "fly on your first mission." Imagine, astronauts Steve Lindsey and Mike Bloomfield were students of mine at the Academy! Not long ago, Mission-to-Mir astronaut Jim Reilly shared this prize piece of high-pressure communication from a mission to Mir with me and Gil Darcy's son Randy: "There we were, two hundred and forty miles about the earth, traveling at 17,500 miles per hour, about ready to join up with Mir, and I had to fix a glitch fast," Jim tells us over breakfast at a Coca Beach pancake house. "So, in the interest of time, Terry Wilcutt, the skipper of space shuttle *Endeavour*, asks me three questions: "Do you have a plan? Is it working? Are you ahead or behind?" Wow. I've collected a whole bunch a great

stories from the astronauts I've known.

In fact, even before my work with NASA a young Jim Lovell told me about orbiting the moon. And before Jim Irwin passed away, he used to sit with me in my Air Force Academy office in Harmon Hall, spinning tales of the spirituality of space and what it was like to walk on the moon and how he drove the first rover along the front of Apennine Mountain on Apollo 15. Believe me, even Joseph Campbell would have given his eyeteeth to hear some of the things astronauts have shared with me.

An astronaut was once asked to make a speech to a group of archaeologists who were on a dig in New Mexico. Their base camp had been set up right at the foot of some rock structures that had ancient petroglyphs carved on them. The speech was to be delivered at night, at the campfire, under the stars. She wanted me to help her think out her speech strategy. As I did, I thought of the significance of that event. Campbell would have undoubtedly marveled at how that speech was so mystically connected to so many campfires over centuries of human storytelling.

Telling tales around the campfire. That's what it all boils down to. We're still doing it. We're still venturing out, slaying dragons, and returning home with the prize. Technology has expanded the territory, making the adventures even more perilous and exciting. Though the telling of the tales is carried to us by strange new voices, the message is always about the classic epic of the human spirit and the mother dust from which it sprang.

Not long ago I got this e-mail from an astronaut orbiting far above me: "Dear Bill, I would like to send you my best wishes and regards from space! It is absolutely gorgeous up here, of course because of our mission and because of the view of our home planet, a blue and white marvel in a black, black universe. But mostly it is so gorgeous because of my crewmates. There is no difference between Earth and orbit: It is the people who make the difference!! With kind regards from LEO, currently Atlantic Ocean, just offshore of Argentina. Gerhard. ***Ceterum censeo exploranda mortalibus astra***."

Ah, the stories they tell.

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